

Mental Health and Depression in Older Adults

July 2012

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

MENTAL HEALTH

Good mental health is an essential component of healthy aging. According to the American Association of Geriatric Psychiatry's 2008 figures, an estimated 20% of people age 55 or older experience at least one mental health concern. Some common mental health conditions include:

- Anxiety
- Cognitive Impairment
- Depression.

DEPRESSION

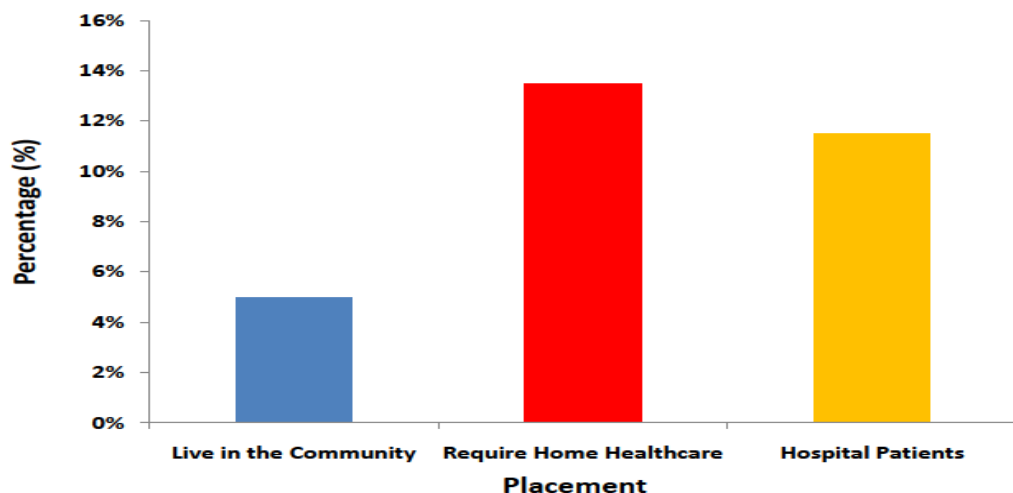
Depression is associated with distress and suffering. Individuals who exhibit symptoms of depression often find it difficult to manage and treat other chronic conditions. This results in:

- more emergency department visits
- more frequent usage of medications
- longer hospital stays
- more medical expenditures

A COMMON MISCONCEPTION

A common misconception is that depression is a normal part of aging. While older adults are at a greater risk of experiencing symptoms of depression, it is a treatable medical condition with symptoms that should not be ignored. Depression is more common in individuals who have been diagnosed with other illnesses or those who are also experiencing limited functioning.

Depression in Older Adults



Source: Centers for Disease Control, Aging and Depression, 2012.

WARNING SIGNS

- Feelings of hopelessness and/or pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and/or helplessness
- Irritability, restlessness
- Loss of interest in activities or hobbies once pleasurable
- Fatigue and decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering details and making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning wakefulness, or excessive sleeping
- Overeating or appetite loss
- Thoughts of suicide, suicide attempts
- Persistent aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems that do not improve with treatment

DEMENTIA V.S. DEPRESSION

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION

- Mental decline is relatively rapid
- The individual knows the correct time, date at a given moment
- Difficulty concentrating
- Language and motor skills are slow, but normal
- Notices or worries about memory problems

SYMPTOMS OF DEMENTIA

- Mental decline happens slowly
- Confused and disoriented; becomes lost in familiar locations
- Difficulty with short-term memory
- Writing, speaking, and motor skills are impaired
- Doesn't notice memory problems or seem to care

SELF HELP TIPS

Learn A New Skill

Pick something that you've always wanted to learn, or that sparks your imagination and creativity.

Exercise

Regular exercise may also help prevent depression or lift your mood if you are somewhat depressed. Older people who are depressed can gain mental as well as physical benefits from moderate forms of exercise.

Get Enough Sleep

When you don't get enough sleep, your depression symptoms can be worse. Aim for somewhere between 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night.

Maintain A Healthy Diet

Avoid eating too much sugar and junk food. Choose healthy foods that provide nourishment and energy, and take a daily multivitamin.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/aging-depression.aspx>
<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/mentalhealth/depression.htm>
http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_elderly.htm
<http://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/tc/healthy-aging-emotional-and-mental-vitality>
<http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/depression>
<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/MAHA/MahaHome.aspx>
<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/mentalhealth/index.htm>
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